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ABSTRACT

Visiting the Temple of Kali in Calcutta, India, one understands the importance of an Afro-centric methodology in describing the complex nature of the Mother Goddess in ancient India. Discoveries of ancient female figurines indicate an early Indian concept of the female role in the creation of civilization and culture and of the notion of the female principle as pure cosmic energy that infuses all creation with life. However, after the Indo-Aryan invasion of India, women were reduced to images of insignificance when compared to the power given to the Indo-Aryan male deities. Research carried out in India provided the basis for an interdisciplinary upper division college level humanities course designed to give students familiarity with the history, culture, and world views of ancient Africa and ancient India. The course description includes student learning objectives, a reading list, and a 31-item bibliography. (NL)

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STUDIES IN CONTINUITY AND CHANGE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE MOTHER GODDESS IN ANCIENT INDIA AND ANCIENT EGYPT

A PRELIMINARY RESEARCH REPORT AND CURRICULUM DESIGN

Last summer I had the fortunate opportunity to study and travel in India under the auspices of the Fullbright Summer Seminars Abroad Program. I was interested, because of my readings on the African presence in Ancient Asian, in exploring the Africa presence in Ancient India and in documenting any parallels I could discover between Ancient and Traditional India and Ancient and Traditional Africa. I also went to India because my previous research into Ancient Egyptian Mother Goddesses had awakened in me a curiosity about the nature and function of Ancient Indian Mother Goddesses.

My research plan was to (1) gain an understanding of Pre- Aryan, Dravidian, Tribal, Dalit, (the preferred name for "the Indian Untouchables") and Vedic culture through seminars, interviews and bibliographic research; (2) identify African parallels; (3) develop an appreciation of the nature and history of selected Ancient and traditional Mother Goddesses through a review of artifacts, Vedic, Epic,Puranic and Tantric literature; and (4) identify Ancient Egyptian parallels.

My first few days in India were a little frustrating and disheartening. People reacted to me incredulously when in conversation or in our seminars when I described my research project and asked questions about " The Pre-

Aryans and their African Connection, questions such as " Who were they ? " "Where did they come from?" " Where had they gone?" " Did any parts of their culture or world view remain? "

It wasn't until I visited the National Museum in New Delhi and happened upon two exhibits, one on Indus Valley artifacts and one on Indian Tribal Art, that I became convinced that my hypotheses that "there was an African presence in Ancient India and that this presence remains and can be found in contemporary Indian life and culture" had validity as well as scholarly and pedagogical importance.

For the sculptures that I saw in the museum in Delhi looked just like the sculptures I had seen the previous March at the National Museum of African Art in Washington D.C. There before me were the same images of figurines at mid point mimesis - balancing between specificity and abstractness, emotionally described and proportioned through head-dresses, richly rounded or projected anatomy, powerful in their symmetry, simplicity and symbolism, the same images of extended families, of complementary male/female dualities and ancestral recognition. There before me was clear encouragement to continue my investigations.

However, it wasn't until I went to Calcutta and visited the Temple of Kali, the Black Goddess, the Dark Mother, the Primordial Goddess of creation, destruction and preservation, that I began to truly understand the importance of an Afro-centric methodology in describing and interpreting the complex nature and often paradoxical roles and functions of the Mother

Goddess in Ancient and Traditional India and the universality, totality and power of the female principle.

The Afro-centric world view sees the universe and all in it as unified and balanced, as diunital i.e. consisting of complementary dualities, moving in cyclic patterns, potentially divine and originating in the creative word and since the Mother Goddess contains all aspects and polarities, the supreme and the subordinate, the supra - divine and the maternally human, the terrible and the adorable and the mild and the fierce, using a methodology based on such a world view that includes as opposed to excludes, that perceives phenomena holistically as opposed to fragmented entities seems appropriate and imperative.

What follows, is a summary of my research, a description of my resultant curriculum design and a bibliography of texts used to support my findings and conclusions. The first part of my research summary describes my findings and conclusions so far on the cultural ethos and ethnicity of the Pre-Aryan Indus Valley civilization and on the role and function of the Mother Goddess tradition in Ancient India. Throughout, it points out the parallels between it and Ancient Egyptian civilization and its Mother Goddess tradition. The second part looks at the suppression of the Goddess during Vedic times and at her re-emergence in Tantric and Puranic Times and compares her suppression and resurrection to the suppression of the Goddess during the First intermediate period of Egyptian times and her resurrection during the 25th Dynasty. The third part discusses the importance of rescuing and restoring the Ancient wisdom about the totality and potency of the female power principle to today's world.

A PRELIMINARY RESEARCH SUMMARY

PART ONE

While there has been debate about who were the people that created the Indus Valley Civilization, one thing for sure, if one examines the literature of the Aryan invaders, is that they were not Indo-Aryans. The two groups differed sharply in language , social beliefs, ethnicity and physiology. According to the Vedas, the earliest written Aryan literature, the Pre-Aryans worshiped the Mother Goddess, Nature and the linga-yoni. The Aryans worshiped a male god, fire, and introduced the notion of sacrifice. The Pre-Aryans were matriarchal. The Aryans were patriarchal. The pre- Aryans had flat noses and were dark skinned. The Aryans had sharp noses and were fair. The Aryans called themselves the people of the sky i.e. inherently light, good, superior and mighty. They called the darker skinned Pre- Aryan" the people of the earth and the serpent i.e. inherently dark, evil, weak and inferior. The Rg-Veda describes how Indra, the god of the Aryans, killed the Dasas or Pre-Aryans and protected the Aryan "color".

The finds from the excavations carried out at Harappa and Mohenjo-daro indicate that, like the civilizations of Ancient Africa and unlike the Indo-Aryans, the Indus Valley Civilization had an agriculture base and a highly organized city life. They also reveal that like the civilizations of the

Nile Valley and West and South Africa, the Indus Valley civilization was marked by major engineering projects, well developed pictorial ideographic writing and conscious art production.

Female figurines, akin to those also found in early African culture, indicate an early Indian recognition of the Mother Goddess concept. These figurines also indicate an early recognition of the role women played in the childbearing and nurturing process, in the producing, storing and distribution of vegetable food stuff.

The pre-Dynastic and dynastic literary texts of Ancient Egypt also recognized the role of the female in the creation and maintenance of civilization and culture. The etymology of the Egyptian word for "town" was the Egyptian word for "mother." Dynastic Egyptians traced their descent through the mother, calling themselves X born of lady Y. Pharaohs ruled by matrilineal succession and legitimized themselves by the title "ruler from the womb."

PART TWO

To understand the strength,truth and durability of the Pre-Aryan Goddess tradition that began in the Indus Valley and continues in many parts of India today , one must understand the Indian concept of Sakti. Sakti or the female principle was imaged as the power or the pure Cosmic energy that creates all beings and contains, supports and directs all processes and forces. The sakti or the female principle infuses all creation with the

menses of life, with the blood that creates the universe, time, truth,love, birth and death.

For these reasons, the Mother Goddess is described in **The Mahanivanatantra**, as the one the Gods address thusly:

> Thou art the Original of all the manifestations;
> Thou art the birthplace of even us;
> Thou knowest the world, yet none know thee...
> Thou art both subtle and gross, manifested and veiled, formless yet with form
> Who can understand thee.
> Resuming after dissolution, thine own form...
> Thou alone remainest as One Ineffable and inconceivable
> though thy self without beginning,
> Multiform by the power of Maya (illusion)
> Thou art the Beginning of all,
> Creatrix, Protectress and Destructress.

How similar is this description to this one of Isis, the Egyptian Mother Goddess:

> the Being eternal and infinite,
> the creative and ruling power of heaven, earth, and the underworld,
> and of every creature and thing in them...

Mother- goddess, lady of the heaven, queen of the gods
who raised up Tem in primeval time,
who existed when nothing else had being,
and who created that which exists...
the God- mother, giver of life...
All that has been, that is and that will be.

However, images that convey the power and importance of the Mother Goddess in early Vedic literature are very rare. Those that do appear were insignificant when compared to the power given to the Aryan male deities. The only Female Deity that is given prominence is Adita, the mother of the Aryan Gods, whose name means "not diti." Dita,the Cow Goddess, was the Mother Goddess of the Pre-Aryan Civilization. In Vedic mythology she too killed by the Aryan God Indra. After her murder, it was said that the cosmic waters flowed and were pregnant with her blood, whose shedding gave birth to the sun of the new patriarchal order and its Brahmanic elite.

The patriarchal Aryan invasion of India wrecked havoc and long periods of social and cultural disarray on the Pre- Aryan people just as the patriarchal Hysoks wrecked havoc on the Egyptians during in the First Intermediate Period. The Hysoks perversions were primarily conceptual for example Maat,the Goddess of Truth was turned into a male God (of the 19th dynasty narrative **The Blinding of Truth By Falsehood**) and women were reduced to images of seductresses and evil doers (see **The Tale of the Two Brothers**) **while the Aryan impact was social, cultural, legal and theological.**

Following their invasion of the Indus Valley,the Aryans imposed a social system based on varna i.e. caste or color. The light skinned Brahmin were on top and the dark-skinned matriarchal Pre-Aryans were on the bottom. The Aryans also instilled into the culture a world view based on a theology of "destiny" that was designed to make people accept miserable conditions and injustices as though these were functions of life itself, rather than the results of specific man made systems.

It was not until the 6th century A.D. that images of the Mother Goddess as powerful and complex began to re-emerge. Just as the 25th dynasty Pharaoh Shabaka restored a world view that had been damaged by the injection of foreign ideologies,natural catastrophes and internal acquiescence, the Tantric and Puranic texts restored the goddess to her rightful place and image. Once again she was described in her totality instead of in separate disconnected personae.

Just as the restoration of the Goddess was brought about by Egyptians, Pharaohs who were committed to the restoration of Ancient wisdoms. So too was the emergence of the Goddess in Tantric and Puranic texts due to the survival of ancient beliefs among the non - Aryan groups of Southwest and Northeast India, who were less effected by Brahmanic teachings of the North.

PART THREE

The Mother Goddess, the female principle or Sakti, was often imaged as a

serpent rising to the Ajna Charkra of the forehead, an image reminisce of the Egyptian Cobra Goddess, Uraeus, who emerges from the rorehead as the third eye of wisdom, that sees and characterizes the unity of all things.

Restoring the Mother Goddess principle to our contemporary pacriarchy is an imperative activity. The male principle was always coupled with a female principle. She was spirit. He was matter. He was the action . She was the legitimization. His power depended on his union with her, his feminine energy, without which he could not act.

I had an interesting conversation in India that is relevant to this discussion. It was in Madras with a Dravidian activist. When in frustration and despair at the situation of the Dalits, I asked if there was any hope? He answered me,"without the women, no."

A CURRICULUM DESIGN

The following is a description of a curriculum design for an interdisciplinary upper division college level Humanities course titled "Studies in Continuity and Change : A Comparative Study of the Mother Goddess in Ancient India and Ancient Egypt." This course was designed for the adult students enrolled on the Urban campus of Evergreen State College in Tacoma, Washington, but can, I believe, be replicated or adapted to most

college or university settings.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course is designed to give students familiarity with the history, cultures and world views of Ancient Africa and Ancient India as a pre-requisite to their in-depth study of the Mother Goddess Tradition in Egypt and India. Classes will consist of lectures, large group discussions of assigned reading and small group seminars. Students will be expected to discuss the implications of their readings and apply the concepts from the lectures, the readings and their independent research to contemporary times, problems and situations.

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

(1) the acquisition of knowledge about the history and culture of Ancient Africa and Dynastic Egypt;

(2) the acquisition of knowledge about the history and culture of Pre-aryan, Vedic and Dravidian India;

(3) learner appreciation of the history, multi-dimensionality, continuity and potentiality of the Mother Goddess tradition .

REQUIRED READING:

The Cultural Unity of Africa, Cheikh Anta Diop,1959

The Cultural Heritage of India,(selections from Volume I and 2), The Ramakrishna Mission Institude of Culture, 1982

The Rig Veda,Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, 1981

Black Women in Antiquity, Ivan Van Sertima, editor, 1985

The Great Cosmic Mother, Monica Sjoo and Barbara Mor,1975

Great Women of India(sections from), Swami Madavananda and Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, editors,1982

Selections from the Puranas and the Tantas

COURSE DESIGN:

(1) Background lectures and readings on Ancient Egyptian culture and world view;

(2) Background lectures and readings on Pre-Aryan, Vedic, Puranic and Tantric India World view;

(3) Background lectures and readings on the Mother Goddess tradition in Ancient India and Ancient Egypt;

(4) Application of the tenets of the traditional to contemporary problematic situations, such as self-knowledge and self-actualization, male-female relationships, human relations, relationships to the environment, etc.

(5) Composition of a detailed Vision Statement projecting what the world

will be like when the Female Goddess principle is reclaimed, returned and restored to its rightful place in history and in life.

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